

**FREE EDUCATION (EDUPATION) POLICY IN IMO STATE:
A KEY INSTRUMENT OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION**

Eugene Obiefule Ifeanyichukwu, Ph.D.

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
ALVAN IKOKU FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION (AIFCE),
OWERRI, IMO STATE
DEPT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Abstract

This paper is an assessment of the free education policy of the Imo State government under the leadership of Governor Rochas Okorocho. The major reason behind the assessment is to ascertain whether the free education policy of the Imo State government under Governor Rochas Okorocho has been a blessing (by achieving its target of providing free and qualitative education) or a curse (by becoming an instrument through which the political executive in the state do embezzle public funds and resources). The qualitative method using document studies/content analysis and the quantitative method using observation were employed in the data gathering and analysis processes. The findings from the qualitative and quantitative analysis of data collated showed that the free education policy of the Imo State government has turned into free edupation (which is using the free education policy to massively embezzle public funds). It is therefore recommended that the Imo State government should as a matter of urgent necessity recover and re-invest these looted funds in both the educational and other sectors that are experiencing massive infrastructural decay.

Keywords: Free Education, Free Edupation, Policy and Political Corruption

Introduction

A public policy according to Okereke (2003:3) are those definite acts or actions of government geared toward the fulfilment of the obligations of government to the citizens. The free education policy as initiated by the Imo state government in 2011 is a definite act of the government that is directed and expected to positively fulfill the educational obligations of government to the Imo indigenes by providing free and qualitative education at all levels of the educational system. Moreover, education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society, and it is what makes a man to eagerly pursue the ideal perfection of citizenship, and which teaches man how rightly to rule and obey (Ocho, 2005). From the foregoing and in relation to the free education policy of the Imo state government, the reverse is the case. The free education policy over the years has been characterized by a lot of shortcomings including the political executive using it as a conduit pipe for siphoning the resources and finances of the state. It is therefore the interest of this study to critically examine the free education policy of the Imo state government and the place of political corruption in its implementation process.

Statement of the Research Problem

According to Ekena and Okonkwo (2001), free education is the education in which the students go to school without paying school fees and other levies. Hence, any free education policy in which parents and guardians of pupils and students are still buying books, uniforms, sandals and other materials in addition to paying for sundry levies is not free education indeed. The free education policy of the Imo state government is presently confronted with the foregoing problems that can easily be noticed within the schools by any careful observer. A field trip to some of the primary and secondary schools especially in the rural areas shows that, parents and guardians are still catering for their childrens' uniforms, writing materials, sandals, WAEC fees, primary school leaving certificate examination fees and other sundry levies etc(source: Ifeanyichukwu, 2016 and 2018 field surveys). There are also the problems of inadequate teaching staff, scarcity of lockers, chairs, tables and overcrowded classrooms especially in the township schools (source: Ifeanyichukwu, October, 2018 field survey). Drawing from the aforementioned problems, the study comes up with the following objectives, questions, scope, methodology and theory.

Objectives of the Study

The general goal of this study is centred around the identification of the problems confronting the Imo state government free education policy while the specific goals will be to identify whether the free education policy has led to free and qualitative education in Imo state.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide this study:

- (i) Has the free education policy of the Imo state government led to free and qualitative education?
- (ii) What is the major difficulty facing the free education policy of the Imo state government?
- (iii) What is the solution to the identified difficulty and the factors responsible for it?

Scope of the Study

This work is centred on the effects of political corruption on the free education policy of the Imo state government from 2011 to 2018.

Methodology

The qualitative method using document studies/content analysis and the quantitative method using observation were employed in the data gathering and analysis processes.

Theoretical Framework

The Elite theory will act as the theoretical guide for this research activity. The Elite theory of politics was developed to the status of a theory in political science by two Italian sociologists, Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Gaetano Moscar (1858-1941) who asserted that, behind the diverse facades of government, power is always confined to a few people comprising the ruling class who constitute a minority of the population, and that public policy is no more than a reflection of the values and preferences of the governing elite (Ikpe, 2010:149-150). According to Moscar (1939:50):

“In all societies, from societies that are very meagerly developed and have barely attained the dawns of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies-two classes of people appear- a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less

numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power/policies for their selfish interest and enjoys the advantages that power brings; whereas the second and the more numerous class is directed and controlled by the first in a manner that is now more or less legal, more or less arbitrary and violent”.

For Putnam (1976:3), the elites share similar values, loyalties and interests that can be represented by James Meisel’s three(3) Cs-group consciousness, coherence and conspiracy and that, they are essentially autonomous, answerable to no one else for their decisions and that all important Political questions are settled according to the selfish interests and whims of the elites even though such decisions/policies might look as if it is for the interest of the masses.

The elite theory will help in guiding this research activity by critically examining the free education policy of the Imo state government, and to see whether it is for providing free and qualitative education for the Imo populace or it has become a conduit pipe for siphoning the state’s resources by the political executive/elite.

Clarification of Major Concepts

(i) **Free Education:** For Ige (2005), when the cost of educating a child is borne by either a government or an external body different from the child’s parent, then it is labelled or termed free education. The concept of Free Education is a policy framework that is designed by the government of a country with the sole aim of funding the education of its citizens as well as encouraging mass school enrolment in the country (Emenike, 2013).

Free Edupation: The use of education as a cover-up and conduit pipe for siphoning public funds and resources is called “Edupation”. Hence, Free Edupation is the corrupt use of the Free Education Policy as a conduit pipe for embezzling state finances and resources (Ifeanyichukwu, 2018).

(ii) **Political corruption:** Corruption according to Sen (1999) is the violation of established rules and procedures for personal gain and profit. However, political corruption is the use of public power for private benefit (Lipset and Lenz, 2000).

(iii) **Policy:** Policy according to Ifeanyichukwu (2012) is a well articulated and properly organized programme or action-plan directed towards accomplishing set goals.

Presentation and Analysis of Research Question One

Has the Free Education policy of the Imo state government led to Free and Qualitative Education?

A Policy or Public policy as earlier stated in the introductory section, are those definite acts or actions of government geared toward the fulfillment of the obligations of government to citizens (Okereke, 2013:3).

In addition, when the entire cost of educating a child is borne by either a government or an external body different from the child’s parent, then it is labeled or termed Free Education (Ige, 2015).

Looking carefully at the foregone or above definitions of Policy and Free Education, it is expected that the Free Education policy of the Imo state government will not only fulfill the obligation of providing free and qualitative education to the Imo people, but also, bear the full cost of education for the Imo populace. The question now is, has the free education policy of the Imo state government that began in late 2011 fulfilled the obligation of providing free and qualitative education to the populace, in addition to bearing the entire cost of the citizens' education.

The answer to the above question is absolutely no. A visit to a majority of the primary and secondary schools in Imo state especially in the rural areas shows the non-availability of quality and adequate teaching staff especially in the core/vital areas of Introductory Technology, Integrated Science, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Agric, Geography, Mathematics, Additional Mathematics, English and History etc (Source: Ifeanyichukwu, Field Survey, 2018). There is also the scarcity of lockers, chairs, tables and overcrowded classrooms etc (Ifeanyichukwu, October, 2018 Field Survey) and also many parents as well as guardians are still catering for their childrens' uniforms, writing materials, sandals, WAEC fees, First School Leaving Certificate Examination Fees and other miscellaneous levies. A free Education programme whereby parents are still paying for their wards WAEC and FSLC fees that run into thousands of naira is not free education indeed. A free education in which students and pupils are not provided with relevant textbooks, and other writing materials is equal to free illiteracy. A free education in which students and pupils are still paying for uniforms, lockers and other study materials is equal to free deception. A free education in which pupils and students are still paying for sundry levies as well as being cheated by their teachers, and the government is doing nothing about it is equal to free exploitation. A free education programme in which there are overcrowded classrooms and offices for both students and teachers is equal to free anarchy.

A brief historical survey of free and Universal Education is not new in Nigeria. For instance, in 1976, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was launched by the then military ruler, Olusegun Obasanjo who made it clear that, basic education should be the birth right and not a privilege of every Nigerian child (Gbadamosi, 2003 and Ogundipe, 2003). In addition, by September, 1999, former President Obasanjo launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Sokoto, and the UBE made education compulsory and free for every Nigerian child from primary to Junior Secondary school III (Obilo and Sangoleye, 2010: 262). If the UBE has made education free for every Nigerian child up to Junior Secondary School III, then all the noise of the Imo State government about free education is only for Senior Secondary School I(one) to III(three), and yet it is suffering from the lack of many logistics, corruption and poor implementation.

Presentation and Analysis of Research Question Two

What is the major difficulty facing the Free Education Policy of the Imo state government? A key factor that is negatively challenging the Free Education Policy of the Imo State government is the issue of Political corruption, and political corruption according to Lipset and Lenz (2000) is the use of Public or State Power for private benefit. The political executive in Imo state has been using the free education policy to massively embezzle public funds since late 2011 to the present. The government that was popularly elected in 2011 to save the Imolites from corrupt and unresponsive leadership, became itself more than corrupt and unresponsive than all its predecessors put together. An obvious and categorical instance of the massive corruption by the political executive in Imo state since 2011 using the Free

Education policy as a conduit pipe for siphoning the public treasury was during the 2013 budget review speech of the governor to the Imo House of Assembly.

The government in 2013 claimed to have spent the sum of ₦46 billion in her Free Education policy that began towards the end of 2011 (source: 2013 Budget Review speech of the Imo state government). A careful and close examination of the actual capital budget spending from 2011, 2012 to 2013 clearly showed that the government's claim was a complete political fallacy and deception of the highest order and level. For example, the Actual Capital Expenditure in 2011 was only 9% of the capital budget which was ₦6,547,973,848; in the year 2012, the Actual Capital Budget Expenditure stood at ₦5,901,134,438 or 4.64% of the total capital budget while the Actual Capital Budget Spending for the year, 2013 stood at ₦15,956,05,10 or 11.85% of the total capital Budget for that year. Summing-up the Actual Capital Budget Expenditures for 2011, 2012 and 2013 (₦6,547,973,848 + ₦5,901,134,438 + ₦15,956,05,10) will give us a total of ₦28,405,113,296. (Source: 2011, 2012 and 2013 Budget Review speeches of the Imo state government).

How can the governor and government claim to have spent a total of ₦46 billion on Free Education programme in three(3) years when the total of all the Actual Capital spendings for 2011, 2012 and 2013 were not up to ₦30 billion. This is not Free Education, but Free Education in which the public treasury and commonwealth of the Imo people have been robbed and emptied using the Free Education Policy as a conduit for siphoning the public purse. The implication of the foregone analysis is that, more than ₦16 billion was looted from the Imo state government treasury from 2011 to 2013.

The political class in Imo state since 1999 especially those elected under popular mandate from 2011, have been playing on the intelligence of the academia and the ignorance/negligence of the legislature/populace over the years, but the future will determine the fate of these political contractors and deceivers.

Policy Implication of the above Findings

If urgent and pro-active steps are not taken to avert this type of massive corruption and deception by the political class in the future, the Imo society and the wider society will move into a state of anarchy, lawlessness and extreme poverty because the commonwealth that is meant to serve the popular welfare have been corruptly looted by the selfish few.

Recommendations

- (i) In the event of this present government refusing to recover all the looted funds that were embezzled using the Free Education Policy, then, incoming and future governments must take every legal step to recover these looted funds.
- (ii) When these looted funds are recovered, they should be honestly and transparently re-invested in both the educational and other sectors that are experiencing massive infrastructural decay.

Conclusion: if Imo state in particular and Nigeria in general must attain the main objective of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), which is the total eradication of poverty through the instrumentality of massive and qualitative education, then, the political leadership at all levels of government must exhibit the highest degree of honesty and transparency in every stage of policy formation, formulation, implementation and monitoring.

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